

## VII

### A Present From the Pass

There was a Thanksgiving feast awaiting them when they got back into the House.

"You look as though you've been in the wars," Mrs. Griffin remarked when she set eyes on Harvey. "Has Wendell been up to his tricks?"

Harvey admitted that he'd fallen for all of them, but there was one that impressed him in particular.

"What was that?" said Wendell with a smug grin. "The falling ladder? That was a clever little touch, wasn't it?"

"No, not the ladder," said Harvey.

"What then?"

"The thing in the sky."

"Oh that..."

"What was it? A kite?"

"That wasn't my doing," Wendell replied.

"What was it then?"

"I don't know," Wendell said, his smile disappearing. "Better not to ask, eh?"

"But I want to know," Harvey insisted, turning to Mrs. Griffin. "It had wings, and I think it flew off the roof."

"Then it was a bat," Mrs. Griffin said.

"No, this was a hundred times bigger than a bat." He spread his arms.

"Great, dark wings."

Mrs. Griffin frowned as Harvey spoke. "You imagined it," she said.

"I did not," Harvey protested.

"Why don't you just sit down and eat?" Mrs. Griffin replied. "If it wasn't a bat then it wasn't anything at all."

"But Wendell saw it too. Didn't you Wendell?"

He looked around at the other boy, who was digging into a steaming plate of turkey and cranberry sauce.

"Who cares?" Wendell said, chewing as he spoke.

"Just tell her you saw it."

Wendell shrugged. "Maybe I did, maybe I didn't. It's Halloween night.

There's supposed to be bogeymen out there."

"But not real ones," said Harvey. "A trick's one thing. But if that beast was real..."

As he spoke he realized he was breaking the rule he'd made on the porch: Whether the winged creature was real or not didn't matter. This was a place of illusions. Wouldn't he be happier here if he just stopped questioning what was real and what wasn't?

"Sit down and eat," Mrs. Griffin said again.

Harvey shook his head. His appetite had disappeared. He was angry, though he wasn't quite sure at whom. Maybe at Wendell, for his shrugs; or at Mrs. Griffin, for not believing him; or at himself, for being afraid of illusions. Maybe all three.

"I'm going up to my room to change," he said, and left the kitchen.

He discovered Lulu on the landing, staring out the window. Wind gusted against the glass, reminding Harvey of Rictus's first visit. It wasn't rain the gusts were bringing, however, it was powdery snow.

"It'll be Christmas soon," she said.

"Will it?"

"There'll be presents for everyone. There always are. You should wish for

something."

"Is that what you're doing?"

She shook her head. "No," she said. "I've been here so long I've got everything I ever wanted. Would you like to see?"

Harvey said yes, and she led him up the stairs to her room, which was immense, and filled with her treasures.

She obviously had a passion for boxes. Tiny, jeweled boxes; large, carved boxes. A box for her collection of glass balls; a box that played tinkling music; a box into which half a hundred smaller boxes fitted.

She also had several families of dolls, who sat in blank-faced rows around the walls. But more impressive by far was the house from which the dolls had been exiled. It stood in the middle of the room, five feet high from step to chimney top, every detail of brick, slate and sill perfect.

"This is where I keep my friends," Lulu said, and opened the front door.

Two bright green lizards came out to greet her, scurrying up her arms onto her shoulders.

"The rest are inside," she said. "Take a look."

Harvey peered through the windows, and found that every perfect room in the house was occupied. There were lizards lounging on the beds, lizards snoozing in the baths, lizards swinging from the chandeliers. He laughed out loud at their antics.

"Aren't they fun?" Lulu said.

"Great!" he replied.

"You can come up and play with them any time you want."

"Thanks."

"They're really very friendly. They only bite when they're hungry. Here-"

She plucked one off her shoulder and dropped it into Harvey's hands. It promptly ran up and perched on his head, much to Lulu's amusement.

They enjoyed the company of both the lizards and each other for a long while, until Harvey caught a glimpse of his reflection in one of the windows, and remembered what a sight he was.

"I'd better go and wash," he told Lulu. "I'll see you later."

She smiled at him. "I like you, Harvey Swick," she said.

Hey honesty made him honest. "I like you too," he told her. Then, his expression darkening, he said: "I wouldn't want anything to happen to you." She looked puzzled.

"I saw you at the lake," he said.

"Did you?" she replied. "I don't remember."

"Well anyway, it's deep. You should be careful. You could slip and fall in."

"I'll be careful," she said as he opened the door. "Oh, and Harvey?"

"Yes?"

"Don't forget to wish for something."

What shall I ask for? he wondered as he washed the dirt off his face. Something impossible maybe, to see just how much magic the House possessed. A white tiger, perhaps. A full-sized zeppelin? A ticket to the moon?

The answer came from the depths of his memory. He'd wish for a present he'd been given (and lost) a long time ago; a present that his father had made for him, which Mr. Hood, however much he might want to please his new guest, would never be able to duplicate.

"The ark," he murmured.

With his face washed, and the scratches he'd got from the thorns in the thicket worn like war wounds, he headed back downstairs, to find that once again the House had performed an extraordinary transformation. A Christmas tree-so tall that the star at its summit pricked the ceiling-stood in the hallway, the colors of its twinkling lights seeping into every room. There was a smell of

chocolate in the air, and the sound of carols being sung. In the living room, Mrs. Griffin was sitting beside a roaring fire, with Stew-Cat purring on her lap.

"Wendell's gone outside," she told Harvey. "There's a scarf and gloves for you by the front door."

Harvey went out onto the porch. The wind was icy, but it was already clearing the snow clouds, leaving the stars to shine down on a perfect white carpet.

Not quite perfect. A trail of tracks led down from the House to the spot where Wendell was building a snowman.

"Coming out?" he hollered to Harvey, his voice as clear as the bells that were ringing through the crisp air.

Harvey shook his head. He was so tired even the snow looked comfortable.

"Maybe tomorrow," he said. "It'll be back tomorrow, won't it?"

"Of course," Wendell yelled. "And the night after, and the night after..."

Harvey went back inside to look at the Christmas tree. Its branches were hung with strings of popcorn and cranberries, with colored lights and baubles and soldiers in gleaming silver uniforms.

"There's something under there for you," Mrs. Griffin said, standing at the living room door. "I hope it's what you want, sweet."

Harvey knelt down and pulled a parcel with his name on it out from under the tree. His pulse quickened before he even opened it, because he knew from its shape, and from the way it rattled, that his wish had been answered. He pulled at the string, remembering as he did so how much littler his hands had been the first time he'd held this gift. The paper tore and fell away, and there, shiny and new, was a painted wooden ark.

It was a perfect copy of the one his father had made. The same yellow hull, the same orange prow, the same wheel-house with holes in its red roof for the giraffes to put their heads through. The same lead animals, all in pairs, snug in the hold or peering through the portholes: two dogs, two elephants, two camels, two doves; all these and a dozen more. And finally, the same little Noah with his square white beard, and his fat wife, complete with apron.

"How did he know?" Harvey murmured.

He hadn't intended the question to be heard, much less answered, but Mrs.

Griffin said: "Mr. Hood knows every dream in your head."

"But this is perfect," Harvey said in amazement. "Look, my dad ran out of blue paint when he was finishing the elephants, so one of them has blue eyes and the other one has green eyes. It's the same. It's exactly the same."

"Does it please you then?" Mrs. Griffin asked.

Harvey said it did, but that wasn't entirely the truth. It was eerie to have the ark back in his hands when he knew the real one had been lost; as though time had been turned on its heels, and he was a little kid again.

He heard Wendell stamping the snow off his feet at the front door, and was suddenly embarrassed to have such a childish present in his hands. He gathered it up in its wrapping and hurried away upstairs, intending to head back down for some supper.

But his bed looked too welcoming to be refused, and his stomach quite full enough for one night, so instead he closed the curtains on the gusty night and laid his head down on his pillow.

The Christmas bells were still ringing in some distant steeple, and their repetition lulled him into sleep. He dreamed that he was standing on the steps of his house, looking through the open door into its warm heart. Then the wind caught hold of him, turning him from the threshold, and carrying him away into a dreamless sleep.

## VII

### Hungry Waters

That first day in the Holiday House, with all its seasons and its spectacles, set the pattern for the many that were to follow.

When Harvey woke the following morning, the sun was once again pouring through a crack in the curtains, but this time it lay in a warm pool on the pillow beside him. He sat up with a shout and a smile, and either one or the other (and sometimes both) remained on his lips for the rest of the day.

There was plenty to do. Work on the tree house in the spring morning, followed by food, and the laying of plans for the afternoon. Games and lazy hours in the heat of summer-sometimes with Wendell, sometimes with Lulu-then adventures by the light of a harvest moon. And finally, when the winter wind had blown out the flames in the pumpkin heads, and carpeted the grounds with snow, chilly fun for them all out in the frosty air, and a warm Christmas welcome when they were done.

It was a day of holidays, the third as fine as the second, and the fourth as fine as the third, and very soon Harvey began to forget that there was a dull world out beyond the wall, where the great beast February was still sleeping its tedious sleep.

His only real reminder of the life he'd left-besides a second telephone call he'd made to his mom and dad just to tell them all was well-was the present he'd wished for, and received, that first Christmas: his ark. He'd thought several times of trying it out on the lake, to see if it would float, but it wasn't until the afternoon of the seventh day that he got around to doing so.

Wendell had made a real glutton of himself at lunch, and had declared that it was far too hot to play, so Harvey wandered down to the lake on his own, with the ark tucked under his arm. He half expected-hoped, in fact to find Lulu down there to keep him company, but the banks of the lake were empty.

Once he laid eyes on the gloomy waters he almost gave upon the idea of a launching, but that meant admitting something to himself that he didn't wish to admit, so he headed on down to the shore, found a rock to perch on that looked less precarious than the others, and set his ark on the water.

It floated well, he was pleased to see. He pushed it to and fro for a little while, then lifted it out and peered inside to see if it was leaking. It was quite watertight, however, so he set it back on the lake and pushed it out again.

As he did so, he caught sight of a fish rising from the bottom of the lake, its mouth wide open, as if it intended to swallow his little vessel whole. He reached out to snatch the ark from the water before it was either sunk or devoured, but in his haste he lost his footing on the slime-slickened rock, and with a cry he fell into the lake.

The water was icy cold, and eager. It quickly closed over his head. He flailed wildly, trying not to imagine the dark depths beneath him, or the vast maw of the fish that had been rising from those depths. Turning his face up toward the surface, he started to swim.

He could see his ark floating above him, capsized by his fall. Its lead passengers were already sinking. He didn't try and save them, but surfaced gasping for breath-and paddled toward the shore. It wasn't much of a distance.

In less than a minute he was hauling himself up onto the rocks and scrambling away from the bank, water pouring from his sleeves and trousers and shoes. Only

when his feet were well clear of the lake, and no hungry fish could snap at his toes, did he drop down onto the ground.

Though it was midsummer, and the sun was blazing somewhere overhead, the air around the lake was cold, and he soon began to shiver. Before he made his way out into the sun, however, he looked for some sign of his ark. The spot where it had sunk was marked by a forlorn flotilla of wreckage, all of which would soon join the rest of the ark at the bottom.

Of the fish that had seemed so eager to devour him there was no sign.

Perhaps it had swum down into the depths to chew on the drowned menagerie. If so, Harvey hoped it choked on its dinner.

He'd lost plenty of toys before. He'd had a brand new bicycle-his prize possession!-stolen from the step of his house two birthdays ago. But this loss upset him as much; more, in fact. The idea that the lake now had something that he'd owned was somehow worse than a thief running off with his bike. A thief was warm flesh and blood; the lake was not. His possessions had gone into a nightmare place, full of monstrous things, and he felt as though a little part of himself had gone with it, down into the dark.

He walked away from the lake without looking back, but the breeze that came to warm his face when he broke through the thicket, and the sound of birds that pleased his ear, could not keep from his mind the thought he'd tried to ignore when he'd gone down to the water. Despite all entertainments that the Holiday House supplied so eagerly, it was a haunted place, and however hard he had tried to ignore his doubts and suppress his questions, they could be ignored and suppressed no longer. Whoever, or whatever, that haunter was, Harvey could not be content now until he'd seen its face and knew its nature

## IX

### What Do You Dream?

Harvey didn't mention what had happened at the lake to anyone-not even Lulu-in part because he felt stupid for falling in and in part because the House tried so hard to please him in the days that followed that he almost forgot about the accident entirely. That very night, in fact, he found a piece of colored string with his name tag on it at the base of the Christmas tree, and followed it through the House to find a new bike-even more splendid than the one he'd lost two years before-waiting for him.

But that was just the first of many fine surprises the Holiday House sprang in quick succession. One morning, for instance, Wendell and Harvey climbed up into the tree house to discover that the branches around it were swarming with parrots and monkeys. Another day, in the middle of Thanksgiving dinner, Mrs. Griffin called them through into the living room, where the flames of the fire had taken on the shapes of dragons and heroes, and were doing fiery battle in the grate. And in the heat of one lazy afternoon, Harvey was wakened from a doze by a chorus of shouts and found a troupe of mechanical acrobats performing clockwork-defying feats on the lawn.

The greatest surprise, however, began with the appearance of one of Rictus's siblings.

"My name is Jive," he said, stepping out of the early evening murk at the top of the stairs. Every muscle in his body seemed to be in motion: tics, jigs and jitterings that had wasted him away until he barely cast a shadow. Even his hair, which was a mass of oiled curls, seemed to hear some crazed rhythm. It writhed on his scalp in a knotted frenzy.

"Brother Rictus sent me along to see how you're doin'," he said, his tones succulent.

"I'm doing fine," Harvey replied. "Did you say Brother Rictus?"

"We're from the same brood, loosely speaking," Jive said. "I hope you call your family now and then."

"Yep" said Harvey. "I called them yesterday."

"Are they missin' you?"

"Didn't sound like it"

"Are you missin' them?"

Harvey shrugged. "Not really," he said.

(This wasn't strictly true-he had his homesick days-but he knew if he went back home he'd be in school the day after, and wishing he'd stayed in the Holiday House a while longer.)

"You're going to make the most of bein' here then?" said Jive, practicing a weird little dance step up and down the stairs.

"Yeah," said Harvey. "I just want to have fun."

"Who doesn't?" Jive grinned, "who doesn't?" He sidled up to Harvey, and whispered: "Speakin' of fun..."

"What?" said Harvey.

"You never did get Wendell back for that trick of his."

"No, I didn't," said Harvey.

"Why the heck not?"

"I could never think of a way."

"Oh I'm sure we could cook something up between the two of us," Jive replied mischievously.

"It has to be something he'll never think of," Harvey said.

"That shouldn't be difficult," said Jive. "Tell me, what's your favorite monster?"

Harvey didn't have to think hard about that. "A vampire," he said with a grin. "I found this great mask-"

"Masks are a good beginning," Jive said, "but vampires need to swoop out of the mist " he spread his arms, curling his long fingers like the claws of some eye-gouging beast "-swoop down, snatch up their prey, then rise up again, up against the moon. I can see it now."

"So can I," said Harvey. "But I'm not a bat."

"So?"

"So how do I swoop?"

"Ah," said Jive. "We'll have Marr work on that for us. After all, what's a Halloween without a transformation or two?" He consulted the grandfather clock on the landing. "We've still got time to do it tonight. You go down and tell Wendell you'll meet him outside. I'll go up on to the roof and find Marr. You meet us up there."

"I've never been up on the roof."

"There's a door on the top landing. I'll see you up there in a few minutes."

"I'll have to get my mask an' coat an' stuff."

"You won't need a mask tonight," Jive said, "trust me. Now you hurry up. Time's a-wastin'."

It took Harvey only a minute or two to tell Wendell to go on ahead. He was sure Wendell suspected something, and was probably preparing some counterattack, but Harvey knew he and Jive had something up their sleeves even Wendell-expert on shock tactics though he was-couldn't anticipate. With the first part of the plan laid he hurried upstairs again, found the door Jive had mentioned, and climbed up onto the roof.

Heights had never bothered him; he liked to be up above the world looking down on it.

"Over here!" Jive called to him, and Harvey took off along the narrow walkways and up the steep roofs to where his fellow conspirator stood.

"Sure-footed!" Jive observed.

"No problem."

"How 'bout flyin'?" said a third voice, as its owner stepped from the shadows of a chimney.

"This is Marr," Jive said. "Another of our little family."

Unlike Jive who looked nimble enough to walk on the eaves if the whim took him, Marr seemed to have slug blood in her somewhere. Harvey almost expected to see her fingers leave silver trails on the brick she touched, or see soft horns appear from her balding head. She was grossly fat, her flesh barely clinging to her bones. Wherever it could-around her mouth and eyes, at her neck and wrists it collapsed in clammy folds. She reached out and poked Harvey.

"I said: what 'bout flyin'?"

"What about it?" Harvey said, pushing her hand away.

"Done much?"

"I flew to Florida once."

"She doesn't mean in a plane," Jive told him.

"Oh..."

"In dreams maybe?" said Mart.

"Oh yeah, I dream about flying."

"That's good," Marr replied, grinning with satisfaction. She had not a single tooth in her mouth.

Harvey stared at the empty maw in disgust.

"You're wondering where they've gone, aren't you?" she said to Harvey. "Go on. Admit it."

Harvey shrugged. "Well yes. I am."

"Carna took them, the thieving brute. I had fine teeth. Beautiful teeth."

"Who's Carna?" Harvey wanted to know.

"Never mind," Jive said, hushing Marr before she could reply. "Get to it or he'll miss the moment."

Marr muttered something beneath her breath, then said: "Come to me, boy," extending her arms in Harvey's direction. Her touch was icy.

"Feels weird, huh?" said Jive, as Mares fingers floated over his face, brushing it here and there. "Don't worry. She knows what she's doin'."

"And what's that?"

"Changin' you."

"Into what?"

"You tell her," Jive said. "It won't last long, so enjoy it. Go on, tell her about being a vampire."

"That's what I want Wendell to see," Harvey said.

"A vampire..." Marr said softly, her fingers pressing harder against his skin.

"Yeah, I want to have fangs, like a wolf, and a red throat, and white skin, like I've been dead for a thousand years."

"Two thousand!" said Jive.

"Ten thousand!" said Harvey, beginning to enjoy the game. "And crazy eyes, that can see in the dark, and pointy ears, like a bat's ears-"

"Wait up!" Marr said. "I've got to get all this right."

Her fingers were working hard upon him now, as though his flesh was clay, and she was molding it. His face was tingling, and he wanted to reach up and touch it, but he was afraid of spoiling her handiwork.

"And there's got to be fur," Jive observed. "Sleek, black fur on his neck-"

"

Mares hands dabbled at his throat, and he felt fur sprouting where she'd touched him.

"-and the wings!" Harvey said. "Don't forget the wings!

"Never!" said Jive.

"Spread your arms, boy," Marr told him.

He did so, and she ran her hands along them, smiling now.

"It's good," she said. "It's good."

He looked down at himself. To his astonishment he found his fingers were gnarled and sharp, and leathery flaps were hanging from his arms. The wind gusted against them, threatening to carry him off the roof then and there.

"You know you're playin' a dangerous game, don't you?" Marr said as she stood back to admire her handiwork. "You'll either break your head or scare the life out of your friend Wendell. Or both."

"He won't fall, woman!" Jive said. "He's got the knack of this. I can tell just by looking at him." He peered at Harvey with his squinty eyes. "Wouldn't be surprised if you weren't a vampire in another life, boy," he said.

"Vampires don't have other lives," Harvey said, the words more difficult to say with a mouthful of fangs. "They live forever."

"That's right," said Jive, snapping his fingers. "So they do! So they do!"

"Well, I'm finished," said Marr. "You can get goin', boy."

The wind came gusting again, and if Jive hadn't been holding onto him as they walked the edge of the roof, Harvey would surely have been carried away.

"There's your friend," Jive whispered, pointing down into the shadows.

Much to his amazement Harvey found that he could see Wendell quite clearly, even though it was pitch dark in the thicket. He could hear him too: every little breath, every beat of his heart.

"This is it," Jive hissed, putting his hand on Harvey's back.

"What do I do?" Harvey said. "Do I flap or what?"

"Jump!" Jive said. "The wind'll take care of the rest. Either the wind or gravity."

And with that, he shoved Harvey off the edge of the roof and into the empty air.

X

### Falling From Grace

The wind wasn't there to bear him up. He plummeted like a slate tossed from the gables, a cry of sheer terror escaping his throat. He saw Wendell turn; saw a look of mortal fear come onto his face; then the wind came out of nowhere, cold and strong, and just as his legs brushed the bushes he felt himself lifted up and up, toward the sky.

His cry became a whoop; his terror, joy. The moon was larger than he'd ever seen it, and its vast white face filled his sight, like the face of his mother, bending to kiss him goodnight.

Except that he needed no sleep tonight, no, nor a mother to wish him sweet dreams. This was better than any dream, flying with the wind in his wings, and the world shuddering below in fear of his shadow.

He looked for Wendell again, and saw him fleeing for the safety of the House.

No you don't, he thought, and fuming his wings like leathery sails he swooped down on his prey. A bloodcurdling shriek filled his ears, and for a moment he thought it was the wind. Then he realized it was his own throat that was uttering this inhuman din, and the shriek became laughter; wild, lunatic laughter.

"Don't...please...don't!" Wendell was sobbing as he ran, "Somebody help



me! Somebody help me!"

Harvey knew he'd already had his revenge: Wendell was frightened out of his wits. But it was too much fun to stop now. He liked the feel of the wind beneath him, and the cold moon on his back. He liked the sharpness of his eyes, and the strength of his claws. But most of all he liked the fear he was causing; liked the look on Wendell's upturned face, and the sound of panic in his chest. The wind was carrying him down into the thicket, and as he landed Wendell dropped to his knees, begging for mercy.

"Don't kill me! Please, please, I beg you-don't kill me!"

Harvey had seen and heard enough. He'd had his revenge. It was time to put an end to the game, before the fun soured.

He opened his mouth to announce himself, but Wendell-seeing the red throat and the wolfish fangs, and thinking this meant certain death-began a new round of supplications. This time, however, he wasn't simply begging.

"I'm too fat to eat," he said. "But there's another kid around here somewhere-"

Harvey growled at this.

"There is!" Wendell said. "I swear. And there's more meat on him than on me!"

"Listen to the child," said a voice in the bushes at Harvey's side. He glanced around. There was Jive, his wiry form barely visible among the barbs.

"He'd see you dead, young Harvey."

Wendell heard none of this. He was still advertising the edibility of his friend, hoisting up his shirt and shaking his blubbery belly to prove how unpalatable he was.

"You don't want me..." he sobbed. "Take Harvey! Take Harvey!"

"Bite him," said Jive. "Go on. Drink a little of his blood. Why not? The fat's no good, but the blood's hot, the blood's tasty." He was doing a little dance as he spoke, stamping his feet to the rhythm of his chant. "Don't waste the taste! Go eat the meat!"

And still Wendell whined, all snot and tears. "You don't want me. Find Harvey! Find Harvey!"

And the more he sobbed, the more Jive's chant made sense to Harvey. Who was this ridiculous boy Wendell anyway? He was too eager to serve Harvey up as dinner to be called a friend. He was just a tasty morsel. Any vampire worth his wings would chew off his head as soon as look at him. And yet...

"What are you waiting for?" Jive wanted to know. "We've gone to all this trouble to make a monster of you-"

"Yes, but it's a game," Harvey said.

"A game?" said Jive. "No, no, boy. It's more than that. It's an education."

Harvey didn't know what he meant by this, and he wasn't altogether certain he wanted to know.

"If you don't pounce soon," Jive hissed, "you're going to lose him."

It was true. Wendell's tears were clearing, and he was staring at his attacker with a puzzled look.

"Are you...going to let me...go?" he murmured.

Harvey felt Jive's hand on his back.

"Do it!" Jive said.

Harvey looked at Wendell's tear-stained face and trembling hands. If the situation had been reversed, he thought to himself, would I have been much braver? The answer, he knew, was no.

"It's now or never," said Jive.

"Then it's never," Harvey said. "Never!"

The word came out as a guttural roar, and Wendell fled before it, yelling at the top of his voice. Harvey didn't give chase.

"You disappoint me, boy," Jive said. "I thought you had the killer instinct."

"Well, I don't," said Harvey, a little ashamed of himself. He felt like a coward, even though he knew he'd done the right thing.

"That was a waste of magic," said another voice, and Marr appeared from out of the bushes, her arms filled with enormous fungi.

"Where'd you find those?" Jive said.

"Usual place," Marr replied. She gave Harvey a contemptuous look. "I suppose you want your old body back," she said.

"Yes, please."

"We should leave him like this," said Jive. "He'd get around to sucking blood sooner or later."

"Nah," said Marr. "There's only so much magic to go around, you know that. Why waste it on a miserable little punk like this?"

She waved her hand casually in Harvey's direction, and he felt the power that had filled his limbs and transformed his face drain out of him. It was a relief, of course, to feel the magic unmade, but a little part of him mourned the loss. In a matter of moments he was once again an earthbound boy, wingless and weak.

With the spell removed, Marr turned her back on him and waddled off into the darkness. Jive, however, lingered long enough to have one last dig at Harvey.

"You missed your chance there, kiddo," he said. "You could have been one of the greats."

"It was a trick, that's all," Harvey said, concealing the strange unhappiness he felt. "A Halloween trick. It meant nothing."

"There are those who'd disagree," Jive said darkly. "Those who'd say that all the great powers in the world are bloodsuckers and soul-stealers at heart. And we must serve them. All of us. Serve them to our dying day"

He stared hard at Harvey all the way through this peculiar little speech, and then, with a nimble step, retreated into the shadows and was gone.

Harvey found Wendell in the kitchen, a hot dog in one hand and a cookie in the other, telling Mrs. Griffin about what he'd seen. He dropped his food when Harvey came in, and yelped with relief: "You're alive! You're alive!"

"Of course I'm alive," said Harvey. "Why shouldn't I be?"

"There was something out there. A terrible beast. It almost ate me. I thought maybe it had eaten you."

Harvey looked down at his hands and legs.

"Nope," he said. "Not a nibble."

"I'm glad!" Wendell said. "I'm so, so glad. You're my best friend, for always."

I was vampire food five minutes ago, Harvey thought; but he said nothing. Maybe there'd come a time when he could tell Wendell about his transformation and temptation, but this wasn't it. He simply said:

"I'm hungry," and sat down at the table beside his fair-weather friend, to put something sweeter than blood in his belly.

Turnabout

Neither Wendell nor Lulu was around the following day-Mrs. Griffin said she'd seen them both before breakfast, and then they'd disappeared-so Harvey was left to his own devices. He tried not to think about what had happened the night before, but he couldn't help himself.

Snatches of conversation kept coming back, and he puzzled over them all day long. What had Jive meant, for instance, when he'd told Harvey that turning him into a vampire was not so much a game as an education? What kind of lesson had he learned by jumping off a roof and scaring Wendell?

And all that stuff about soul-stealers and how they had to be served; what had that meant? Was it Mr. Hood that Jive had been speaking of; that great power they all had to serve? If Hood was somewhere in the House, why hadn't anyone-Lulu, Wendell or himself-encountered him? Harvey had quizzed his friends about Hood, and had the same story from them both: they'd heard no footfalls, no whispers, no laughter. If Mr. Hood was indeed here, where was he hiding, and why?

So many questions; so few answers.

And then, if these mysteries weren't enough, another came along to vex him. In the late afternoon, lounging in the shade of the tree house, he heard a yell of frustration, and peered through the leaves to see Wendell racing across the lawn. He was dressed in a windbreaker and boots, even though it was swelteringly hot, and he was stamping around like a madman.

Harvey shouted to him, but his call went either unheard or ignored, so he climbed down and pursued Wendell around the side of the House. He found him in the orchard, red-faced and sweaty.

"What's going on?" he said.

"I can't get out!" Wendell said, grinding a half-rotted apple underfoot.

"I want to leave, Harvey, but there's no way out!"

"Of course there is!"

"I've been trying for hours and hours and I tell you the mist keeps sending me back the way I came"

"Hey, calm down!"

"I want to go home, Harvey," Wendell said, close to tears now. "Last night was too much for me. That thing came after my blood. I know you don't believe me-"

"I do," said Harvey, "honest I do."

"You do?"

"For sure."

"Well, then maybe you should leave too,'cause if I go it'll come after you."

"I don't think so," said Harvey.

"I've been kiddin' myself about this place," Wendell said. "It's dangerous. Oh, yeah, I know it seems like everything's perfect, but-"

Harvey interrupted him. "Maybe you should keep your voice down," he said.

"We should talk about this quietly. In private."

"Like where?" said Wendell, wild-eyed. "The whole place is watching us and listening to us. Don't you feel it?"

"Why would it do that?"

"I don't know!" Wendell snapped. "But last night I thought, if I don't leave I'm going to die here. I'll just disappear one night; or go crazy like

Lulu." He dropped his voice to a whisper. "We're not the first, you know. What about all the clothes upstairs? All the coats and shoes and hats. They belonged to kids like us."

Harvey shuddered. Had he played trick-or-treat in a murdered boy's shoes?

"I want to get out of here," Wendell said, tears running down his face.

"But there's no way out."

"If there's a way in there must be a way out," Harvey reasoned. "We'll go to the wall."

With that he marched off, Wendell in tow, around to the front of the House and down the gentle slope of the lawn. The mist-wall looked perfectly harmless as they approached it.

"Be careful-" Wendell warned. "It's got some tricks up its sleeve."

Harvey slowed his step, expecting the wall to twitch, or even reach for him. But it did nothing. Bolder now, he strode into the mist, fully expecting to emerge on the other side. But by some trick or other he was turned around without even being aware of it, and delivered out of the wall with the House in front of him.

"What happened?" he said to himself. Puzzled, he stepped back into the mist.

The same thing occurred. In he went, and out he came again, facing the opposite direction. He tried again, and again, and again, but the same trick was worked upon him every time, until Harvey was as frustrated as Wendell had been a half hour before.

"Now do you believe me?" Wendell said.

"Yep."

"So what do we do?"

"Well, we don't yell about it," Harvey whispered. "We just get on with the day. Pretend we've given up leaving. I'm going to do a little looking around."

He began his investigations as soon as they got back into the House, by going in search of Lulu. Her bedroom door was closed. He knocked, then called her. There was no reply, so he tried the handle. The door was unlocked.

"Lulu?" he called. "It's Harvey."

She wasn't there, but he was relieved to see that her bed had been slept in, and that she'd apparently been playing with her pets recently. The doors to the doll's house were open, and the lizards were everywhere underfoot. There was one strangeness however. The sound of running water led him through to the bathroom, where he found the bath full almost to brimming, and Lulu's clothes scattered in the puddles on the tile.

"Have you seen Lulu?" he asked Mrs. Griffin when he got downstairs.

"Not in the last few hours," she replied. "But she's been keeping to herself." Mrs. Griffin looked hard at Harvey. "I wouldn't pay too much mind if I were you, child," she said. "Mr. Hood doesn't like inquisitive guests."

"I was only wondering where she'd got to," Harvey said.

Mrs. Griffin frowned, her tongue working against her pale cheek as though it wanted to speak, but didn't dare.

"Anyway" Harvey went on, deliberately goading Mrs. Griffin, "I don't believe Mr. Hood exists."

"Now you be careful," she said, her voice and frown deepening. "You don't want to talk about Mr. Hood that way."

"I've been here...days and days," Harvey said, realizing as he spoke that he'd lost count of his time in the House. "And I haven't seen him once. Where is he?"

Now Mrs. Griffin came at Harvey with her hands raised, and for a moment he thought she was going to strike him. But instead she took hold of his shoulders and shook him.

"Please, child!" she said. "Be content with what you know. You're here to

enjoy yourself for a little time. And child, it's such a little time. It flies by. Oh Lord, how it flies!"

"It's just a few weeks," Harvey said. "I'm not going to stay here forever." Now it was he who stared at her. "Or am I?" he said.

"Stop," she told him.

"You think I am here forever, don't you?" he said, shaking off her grip.

"What is this place, Mrs. Griffin? Is it some kind of prison?"

She shook her head.

"Don't tell me lies," he said. "It's stupid. We're locked up in here, aren't we?"

Now, though she was shaking with fear from head to foot, she dared to make a tiny nod of her head.

"All of us?" he asked. Again she nodded. "You too?"

"Yes," she whispered, "me too. And there's no way out. Believe me, if you try to escape again, Carna will come after you."

"Carna..." he said, remembering the name from the conversation between Jive and Marr.

"He's up there," Mrs. Griffin said. "On the roof. That's where the four of them live. Rictus, Marr, Carna-"

"-and Jive."

"You know."

"I've met them all but Carna."

"Pray you never do," said Mrs. Griffin. "Now listen to me, Harvey. I've seen many children come and go through this House-some of them foolish, some of them selfish, some sweet, some brave-but you, you are one of the brightest souls I have ever set eyes on. I want you to take what joy you can from being here. Use the hours well, because there'll be fewer than you think."

Harvey listened patiently to this. Then, when she'd finished, he said: "I still want to meet Mr. Hood."

"Mr. Hood is dead," Mrs. Griffin said, exasperated by his persistence.

"Dead? You swear?"

"I swear," she replied. "On the Brave of my poor Clue-Cat, I swear: Mr. Hood is dead. So don't ask about him ever again."

This was the first time Mrs. Griffin had ever come close to giving Harvey an order, and though he wanted to press her further, he decided not to. Instead he said he was sorry for bringing up the subject, and wouldn't do it again, then left her to her secret sorrows.

## XII

### What the Flood Gave Up (And What It Took)

Well?" said Wendell, when Harvey came to his room. "What's the story?"

Harvey shrugged. "Everything's fine," he said. "Why don't we just enjoy ourselves while we can?"

"Enjoy ourselves?" Wendell said. "How can we enjoy ourselves when we're locked in?"

"It's better in here than it is out in the world," Harvey said. Wendell looked at him in astonishment. "That's true, isn't it?"

As he spoke he grabbed hold of Wendell's hand, and Wendell realized there was a ball of paper in Harvey's palm, which he was trying to pass between the two of them.

"Maybe you should just find a quiet little corner and do some reading," he

said, glancing down at their hands as he spoke.

Wendell got the idea. He claimed the balled-up note from Harvey's hand and said: "Maybe I'll do that."

"Good," said Harvey. "I'm going to go out and enjoy the sun while I can."

That was exactly what he did. He had a lot of planning to do before midnight, which was when the note told Wendell they should meet to make their escape. Surely even the forces that guarded the House had to sleep sometime (the business of keeping the seasons rolling around couldn't be easy) and of all the hours to slip away, midnight seemed the most promising.

But he didn't suppose it would be easy. The House had been a trap for decades (perhaps centuries: Who knew how old its evil really was?) and even at midnight it would not be so foolish as to leave the exit wide open. They would have to be quick and clever, and not panic or lose their tempers once they were in the mist. The real world was out there somewhere. All they had to do was find it.

He knew when he saw Wendell for Halloween that the note had been read and understood. There was a look in Wendell's eyes that said: I'm ready. I'm nervous, but I'm ready.

The rest of the evening passed for the two of them like the performance of a strange play, in which they were the actors, and the House (or whoever haunted it) was the audience. They went about enjoying themselves as though this was a night like any other, heading out to play trick-or-treat with a show of loud laughter (even though they were both shuddering in their borrowed shoes), then coming in to eat their supper and spend what they hoped would be their last Christmas in the House. They opened their presents (a mechanical dog for Wendell; a magician's kit for Harvey), said their goodnights to Mrs. Griffin (goodbye, of course, not goodnight, but Harvey didn't dare let her know) and then went to bed.

The House grew quiet, and quieter still. The snow no longer sighed at the sill, nor the wind in the chimney. It was, Harvey thought, the deepest silence he'd ever heard; so deep that he could hear his heartbeat in his ears, and every rustle of his body against the sheets sounded like a roll of drums.

A little before midnight he got up and dressed, moving slowly and carefully, so as to make as little noise as possible. Then he headed out into the passageway, and-slipping like a thief from shadow to shadow-hurried down the stairs and out into the night.

He left not by the front door (it was heavy, and creaked loudly) but by the kitchen door, which brought him out at the side of the House. Though the wind had dropped, the air was still bitter and the surface of the snow had frozen. It crackled as he walked, however lightly he trod. But he was beginning to hope that the eyes and ears of the House were indeed closed at this hour (if not, why hadn't he been challenged?) and he might make it to the perimeter without attracting attention.

Just as he was about to turn the corner, however, that sweet hope was soured, as somebody in the murk behind him called his name. He froze in his tracks, hoping the darkness would conceal him, but the voice came again, and again called his name. It was not a voice he recognized. Not Wendell, certainly, nor Mrs. Griffin. Not Jive, not Rictus, not Marr. This was a frail voice; the voice of somebody who barely knew how to shape the syllables of his name.

"Harr...vvvey..."

And then, all of a sudden, he knew the voice, and his heart-which had been working overtime since he'd slipped out of bed-grew so loud in his ears it almost drowned out the summons when it came again.

"Lulu?" he murmured.

"Yesss..." said the voice.

"Where are you?"

"Near..." she said.

He stared at the thicket, hoping for some glimpse of her, but all he could see was the starlight glittering on the frosted leaves.

"You're leaving..." she said, her words slurred.

"Yes," he whispered, "and you have to come with us."

He took a step toward her, and as he did so some of the glitter that he'd thought was frost retreated from him. What was she wearing, that shimmered this way?

"Don't be afraid," he said.

"I don't want you to look at me," she said.

"What's wrong?"

"Please..." she said, "just...keep your distance."

She retreated even farther from him, and seemed to lose her balance as she did so. She dropped to the ground, the thicket around her shaking. Harvey stepped forward to help her up, but she let out such a sob that he stopped in his tracks.

"I only want to help," he said.

"You can't help me," she replied, every word pained. "It's too late. You just have...to go...while you still can. I just...wanted to give you...something to remember me by."

He saw her move in the shadows, reaching out in his direction. "Look away," she said.

He turned his head away from her.

"Now close your eyes. And promise you won't open them."

He dutifully closed his eyes. "I promise," he said.

And now he heard her moving toward him, her breath laborious.

"Open your hand," she said.

Her voice was near now. He knew if he opened his eyes he'd be face to face with her. But he had made a promise, and was determined to keep it. He put out his hand and felt first one, then two, then three heavy little objects, cold and wet, dropped into his cupped palm.

"This was all...I could find..." Lulu said, "...I'm sorry..."

"Can I look?" he asked.

"Not yet. Let me...leave...first..."

He closed his fingers around the gifts she'd given him, trying to make sense of them by touch. What were they? Pieces of frozen stone? No, they were carved. He could feel grooves on one; a head on another. And now, of course, he knew what he held: three survivors of his ark, dredged up from the depths of the lake.

The answer was no comfort to him; quite the reverse. He shuddered as he put the puzzle of Lulu's silvery gleam together with the knowledge of what he held. She had swum down to the bottom of the lake to recover these figures, a descent that was beyond the capacity of any land dweller.

No wonder she'd retreated into the shadows, ordering him not to look at her. She wasn't human any longer. She was becoming-or had already become-a sister to the strange fish that circled in these dark waters, cold-blooded and silver-skinned.

"Oh, Lulu..." he said, "...how did this happen?"

"Don't waste your time with me," she murmured, "just go while you've a chance."

"I want to help," he said.

"You can't..." came the reply, "...can't help me...I've been here too long. My life is over..."

"That's not true," Harvey said. "We're the same age."

"But I've been here so long I don't even remember..." Her voice trailed away.

"Don't remember what?"

"Maybe I just don't want to remember," she said. "It'll hurt too much..." She made along, choked sigh. "You have to go..." she said in a whisper, "...go while you still can."

"I'm not afraid."

"Then you're stupid," she said. "Because you should be."

He heard the thicket shake as she started to retreat from him.

"Wait," he said. She made no reply. "Lulu!"

The din of her departure grew louder. By the sound of it she was almost throwing herself out of his range. Breaking his promise, he opened his eyes, and caught a glimpse of her as she fled; a shadow in the shadows, no more. He started after her, not knowing what he would say or do when he caught up with her, but knowing he'd never forgive himself if he didn't somehow help.

Maybe if he persuaded her to go with him, out of the shadow of the House, its vicious magic would be undone. Or maybe he could find some doctor for her in the outside world who could cure her of this malformation. Anything rather than leaving her to return to the lake.

Its waters were in view now, gleaming darkly between the branches of the thicket. Lulu had reached the bank, and for a moment the meager starlight found her. All that Harvey had feared was true, and more. A fin grew from her bent and scaly back, and her legs had almost fused together. Her arms had become short and stubby, her fingers webbed.

But it was her face, glimpsed as she turned back to look at him, that was the greatest shock.

Her hair had fallen out, and her nose disappeared. Her mouth had lost its lips and her blue eyes turned to swivelling silver balls, lidless and lashless.

And yet, despite their freakishness, there was human feeling in those eyes, and on that mouth: a terrible sadness that he knew would never leave his heart if he lived to be a thousand.

"You were my friend," she said as she teetered on the bank. "Thank you for that."

Then she tumbled into the water.

He went to the edge of the lake at a dash, but by the time he reached the place from which she'd dived the ripples were disappearing and the bubbles breaking. He watched the icy waters for a minute or more, hoping she would see him and surface, but she'd gone where he couldn't follow, and that, it seemed, was the end of it.

Clutching her gifts to him like talismans, he trudged away from the lake and down the lawn to keep his rendezvous with Wendell.